Rabble Rousers' Anarchist Guide
Hallowe'en - Samhain - Day of the Dead

Most every child has fond memories of Hallowe'en – carving jack-o-lanterns, dressing up in ghoulish costumes, and going trick-or-treating. Yet, this popular holiday has an even more radical heritage and revolutionary potential than most folks realize.

Hallowe'en - Originating in the British Isles, Hallowe'en was first brought to the U.S. by Irish refugees from the Potato Famine in the mid 19th century. Trick or treating actually comes from the early wealth redistribution effort of these desperate immigrant children, who would seek handouts from the rich on Oct 31st and – if unsuccessful – retaliate with vandalism. Such mischievous behavior hearkens back to the old Celtic nature spirits known as Sidhe. Other names for Hallowe'en include All Hallows Eve, Hallowtide, Hallowmass, and just simply Hallows ("hallow" in old English means to "sanctify"). The fact that All Saints Day (Nov. 1st) and All Souls Day (Nov. 2nd) occur right after Hallowe'en is no accident – ruling elites were so scared by the pagan power of Oct. 31st that they needed two whole days devoted to cleansing their flock of its evil influence.

6. Irish Frankenstein, Punch (1852)

Samhain – The real insurrectionary threat behind Hallowe'en is to be found in Samhain. Pronounced "SAW –win" in Gaelic, this ancient Celtic holiday marked the end of the summer when crops were harvested and flocks were brought in from pastures. Situated precisely between the Autumn Equinox and Winter Solstice, Oct. 31st was a date of great magical and spiritual power. This was when the living communed with the dead and divining of the future occurred. It was also a festive time for communal unity - people would host feasts and leave extra food out for the spirits, bob for apples or roast nuts to make predictions, and swap cakes containing good luck tokens. Carved turnips (which became the "jack-o-lantern" pumpkins in the New World) were illuminated to guide the way for the deceased, while communal bonfires welcomed them in from the cold.

Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos) – This powerful, yet funfilled, legacy of Samhain also carries over into the Day of the Dead, which is widely celebrated by Latino/a communities throughout the New World on Nov. 2nd (All Souls Day). In contrast to the Christian "Hell," indigenous peoples in much of the rest of the world believe in a pleasant afterlife where ancestors go to relax and play. The resulting synergistic festival includes visits to graves and cemetaries, masked dancing, costume parades, communal feasting with gift exchanges, and all sorts of skeletons (calaveras). These calaveras often engage in mischievous anti-authoritarian behavior. Far from being a morbid event, the Day of the Dead is really a celebration of community and the possibility of life.

Revolutionary Woman Calavera

Related provocative references:
Carmichael, Elizabeth. Skeleton at the Feast. Univ. of TX: Austin, TX 1992
Cortez, Carlos ed. Viva Posada. Charles Kerr: Chicago, IL 2002
CrimethInc. Days of War, Nights of Love. CrimethInc: Atlanta, GA 2000
Hill, Christopher. The World Turned Upside Down. Viking: New York, NY 1972
McKay, George. Senseless Acts of Beauty. Verso: New York, NY 1996
Palmer, Bryan. Cultures of Darkness. Monthly Review Press: New York, NY 2000
www.infoshop.org www.witchvox.com www.ainfos.ca/

Anarchist Hallowe'en/Samhain/Day of the Dead Activities:
*haunting evil establishments – bring along lots of "tricks" to make your point!
*cursing capitalist institutions - http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/taz/taz2c.htm
*agit prop – scary stencils, skeletal graffiti, horrific adbusting
*street theater – costumes, masks, funerals, parades of the dead, exorcisms

From A-Infos News Service posting 10/28/2002 ...

A coalition of London activists is hoping that this year's Halloween will be one to remember, for politicians at least. Disobedients, a newly formed network of anarchists and other anti-militarists, has issued what its members said last week was 'an audacious challenge' to the government. They're calling on people to meet outside the Houses of Parliament on 31st October, dressed in white ...

"We are all ghosts, phantoms of the periphery, the discarded, the dead of all wars. We are those who are invisible and voiceless, those who are ignored by the charade of 'democracy' which beats the drums of war that lead us without consent towards untold destruction and global chaos. But on Halloween, long known as mischief night, a time of change and transformation, the ghosts will take to the streets and become visible again. On that night everyone is invited to dress in white, disguised as ghosts, and converge on parliament, which we'll occupy in order to participate in a mass popular assembly.

Through this act, we'll desert their 'democracy' and take back our voices, reclaiming direct control of our lives. We'll show that politics isn't made by the few but by the many, and we'll declare our disobedience publicly. On Halloween the ghosts will become the 'disobedients'. We'll pledge to do everything in our power to stop the threatened war on Iraq, by direct action and sabotaging the war effort.

Hundreds of thousands of us marched against the war last month, but traditional demonstrations alone won't stop the warmongers. In Britain, we're in the unique position of being able to stop a war from happening. The government is the major international backer of the US administration and, if it pulls out, the US will be completely isolated. We can force the British government to withdraw its support. We can stop the seemingly out-of-control juggernaut dead in its tracks."

Meet outside the Houses of Parliament, 6pm, Thursday 31st October. The Stop the War Coalition has designated this year's Halloween as a day of direct action against war.

Sunday 20th October at 3pm: Organising meeting of the Disobedients Network, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square WC1 (nearest tube Holborn) Thursday 31st October at 2pm Halloween Critical Mass 'ride against death', meet by the peace camp outside the Imperial War Museum, Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Lambeth Road SE1. Dress scary. At 5pm Demonstrate against the war, Brixton Oval.

Madison Infoshop
c/o Social Justice Center
1202 Williamson St.
Madison, WI 53703
madisoninfoshop@gmail.com
www.madinfoshop.wordpress.com